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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000627

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SUBJECT: WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS LOG

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. On January 22, Poloffs met SCIRI parliamentarians Jinan Jasim Ali Al Ubaidi and Muna Noor Zalzal, two of this year's Iraqi delegates to the Commission on the Status of Women. Al-Ubaidi lamented that the role of women in society had been greatly diminished during Saddam's reign, and was still inferior to the role of men. She said that women are excluded from first-tier politicking and allowed to work only on traditional "women's" issues, where they still face meddling from male colleagues. End Summary.

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ROLE OF WOMEN: PAST & FUTURE  
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¶2. (C) During the January 22 meeting, al-Ubaidi told Poloffs that the status of women had diminished during Saddam's reign. She said that oppressive Ba'athist policies severely limited educational opportunities for women, and that fears of being kidnapped and raped by Uday's gangs prevented women from leaving their homes. Al-Ubaidi continued by saying that even when women were willing to go through with university training, they were often relegated to traditionally female fields such as education.

¶3. (C) Al-Ubaidi lamented the high rates of unemployment, underemployment and illiteracy that resulted from these policies and continue to plague women in Iraq. She said that underemployment had caused women to lose important skills sets, and that family responsibilities, especially in families that had lost members in the Iran-Iraq war, left no time for social participation.

¶4. (C) Al-Ubaidi then discussed progress made since the fall of Saddam's regime. She highlighted the extent to which women are now participating in the political process, noting that women serve as parliamentarians and participate in the constitution-making process. However, she noted that politics was still considered the "least accepted field for women," and that there were still "two levels of chess": the men's level and the women's level. Women are still not allowed to participate at the men's level, and occasionally face male interference at their own level.

¶5. (C) Al-Ubaidi outlined priorities for the new parliament, including elimination of "tribal systems of law", greater equity in the distribution of resources, protection of human rights and elevation of women's status. She specifically noted a law

that would make "honor" killings illegal, and a law that would eliminate the tradition of exchanging female family members as a means of conflict resolution between tribes or families.

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THOUGHTS ON GOVERNMENT FORMATION  
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¶6. (C) Saying that it would be up to UIC 555 to select the future Minister of Interior, both women expressed support for the incumbent Bayan Jabr. They highlighted to Poloffs that Jabr has been doing a good job of cleaning out the "Ba'athists" and the insurgents. However, both CoR members said that there was still no lead on who would be nominated for this position, nor any sense of when the council would convene. The next Minister of Interior, they said, would be a Minister with cross-sectarian appeal, and someone who would be required to attend UIA meetings.

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BIO NOTE  
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¶7. (C) Jinan Jasim Ali Al Ubaidi is a doctor who recently gave birth to her fifth child. She is a member of SCIRI and a previous TNA member. She is a graduate of Baghdad University and practiced medicine in Najaf hospital prior to 2003. She is very well-spoken, has a good command of English and appears very interested in women's issues.

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¶8. (C) Muna Noor Zalzal, who lived several years in Denmark, was also a TNA member. Zalzal was reserved during this meeting and not as quick to engage in a conversation on women's issues. However, she seems to be a somewhat outspoken and challenging personality, more willing to engage on conversations relating to what she perceives as mistakes by MNF-I forces.

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